

wireless networks. I look forward to working with Senator CANTWELL in her capacity as chair of the Senate Commerce Committee, Commerce Secretary Raimondo, and the National Telecommunications and Information Administration on this important issue.

#### ZAMBIA

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, I rise to discuss Zambia's upcoming elections and the erosion of democracy under President Edgar Lungu. On August 12, the people of Zambia will go to the polls to elect their President and members of the National Assembly. They will do so under the cloud of growing authoritarianism, with troops in the streets, protesters in prison, and dissenting voices muzzled by censorship. Indeed, many Zambians have good reason to be dissatisfied with their present government and, in a free and fair vote, might very well reject President Lungu's bid for reelection. But I fear they may not have that opportunity.

For nearly 30 years, Zambians have enjoyed a relatively free and open political environment. In 1991, Zambia's founding father Kenneth Kaunda lost the country's first multiparty election in decades and gracefully stepped aside after 27 years in power. President Kaunda died in June of this year, at the age of 97, with a complicated legacy; he was a liberator, but also held an iron grip on power for nearly three decades. However, his final act of public service paved the way for democracy to take root in his country in the years that followed. Sadly, President Lungu is erasing that monumental contribution to the Zambian people.

Since President Lungu's rise to power in 2014, he has used the organs of the state to intimidate his political opponents and consolidate power for his Patriotic Front—PF—party. Freedom House rates Zambia as only “partly free,” citing laws and government actions which have had the effect of restricting the activities of opposition parties, limiting civil society participation, and curbing free expression. Similarly, the U.S. Department of State, in its 2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, noted “significant human rights issues” in Zambia, particularly in the area of elections and political participation.

In March, the Zambian political analyst Dr. Sishuwa published an essay in which he warned that “Zambia may burn after the August elections.” He wrote that the public's distrust of Zambia's institutions and the ruthless competition between its political elites had contributed to a climate of fear and anger that could plunge the country into chaos. The subversion of the independence of the courts and other public institutions has led to a lack of confidence. Credible allegations of corruption and impunity have been made against leaders. A collapsing economy,

mismanaged by President Lungu to the point of defaulting on its foreign loans, has resulted in mass youth unemployment and rising inequality. Dr. Sishuwa also noted Western countries' declining assistance to Zambia and their silence on its democratic backsliding. He painted a vivid image of a once-peaceful and prosperous country on the brink of calamity. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, Zambian police began investigating Dr. Sishuwa for sedition shortly after the essay's publication.

Indeed, political violence has already arrived on the streets of Zambia. Fighting between supporters of the PF and the opposition United Party for National Development—UPND—left at least two people dead last week. Troops have been mobilized to restore order, but Zambian security forces have also been accused of using deadly force against peaceful protesters.

The United States has a clear interest in ensuring that Zambia remains a free and stable country. We have provided approximately \$500 million in assistance to Zambia every year. At a time of increasing instability in Southern Africa, with unrest in South Africa and Eswatini, crackdowns in Zimbabwe, a brutal insurgency in Mozambique, and the rampant spread of COVID-19, the region cannot afford Zambia's collapse. We know that instability anywhere has a rippling effect that impacts U.S. interests and our allies.

Moreover, Zambia presents a test for the Biden administration's commitment to promoting and protecting democracy abroad. I encourage the administration to more address Zambia's democratic backsliding. I hope that is corrected before elections commence. We should be clear with President Lungu that the United States does not tolerate authoritarianism and that the generosity of the American people is not without limits. The United States should increase support for Zambian civil-society and democracy and governance programming in Zambia. Finally, the Biden administration can demonstrate its commitment to the bilateral relationship by nominating a skilled and experienced diplomat to serve as ambassador to Zambia.

While the United States stands with the Zambian people, ultimately, responsibility for Zambia's democratic decline lies squarely with President Lungu and his government. In the short term, President Lungu must commit to holding free and fair elections on August 12 and ensure transparency in the process by permitting election monitors to observe the vote without restrictions. He must also publicly commit to accept the outcome of the election, and step aside should he lose. Regardless of the outcome, the PF, UPND, and all other parties must work together to restore the integrity and independence of public institutions, end impunity for state violence, and address corruption. They must do

this by partnering with civil society, restoring freedom of the press, and respecting civil liberties. They must accept that dissent and protest are not a threat to their power, but rather proof of a healthy polity.

This will be a long and difficult process which will test the courage and patriotism of Zambia's elites. Next week's elections may be the first step towards Zambia's renewal or else the next step towards its ruin. Perhaps President Lung can take inspiration from Kenneth Kendal's final act of leadership and put his country before his own political interests.

#### RECOGNIZING THE MINORITY VETERANS OF AMERICA

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I rise today to pay tribute to Minority Veterans of America on the occasion of their fourth anniversary on August 7, 2021. Minority Veterans of America is doing important work in home State of Washington and around the country advancing equity and justice for nearly 5 million underrepresented veterans, including women, people of color, LGBTQIA+, and religious and nonreligious minorities. As a nation, we make a promise to take care of our veterans when they return from service. It is the least we can do for those who have sacrificed to defend our freedoms. Minority Veterans of America addresses the additional challenges minority veterans face in receiving the benefits they have earned.

Minority Veterans of America was founded in Washington State in 2017 by two military veterans, Lindsay Church and Katherine Pratt. Over the course of 4 years, Minority Veterans of America has grown to include thousands of members spread across nearly every State. They have worked tirelessly advocating for reforms that address economic and health disparities among minority veterans. In my home State of Washington, they have organized innovative programs that address the unique need of minority veterans in transitioning to civilian life, financial stability, social engagement, and access to resources. At the national level, Minority Veterans of America has organized grassroots movements to address issues such as discrimination in the military, military sexual trauma, and the transgender military ban. They also work directly with the Department of Veterans Affairs to increase equitable and inclusive access to services.

It is clear to me that Minority Veterans of America has made a substantial contribution to veterans in Washington State and across the country. It is my pleasure to thank Minority Veterans of America for their hard work and commitment. I congratulate Minority Veterans of America on 4 years of outstanding service to our military veterans and look forward to working with them in the years to come as we continue to advance equity and inclusion for our veterans.